



THE BORGIA APOCALYPSE

THE SCREENPLAY

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Written by

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InkWell Publishing

Published in eBook format by InkWell Publishing

521 5th Avenue, 26th Floor

New York, NY 10175

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INTRODUCTION

I first wrote about the Borgias as an historical film. It was the second historical subject I had attempted – the first was Michael Collins, the film I made for Warner Brothers about the Irish guerrilla leader and the Irish War of Independence. On Michael Collins, I experienced the dilemma of the historical screenplay – the mass of material that has to be encapsulated within a two-hour time frame. So when Dreamworks suggested that I develop a Borgia project as a cable series for

Showtime, I saw it as a unique opportunity to write a 40-hour film, about power, religion and sex in the Renaissance period. It would be as lurid and dramatic as any Jacobean drama, but over four seasons, long enough to do justice to the complexity of the times and the family.

Halfway through the shooting of the third season, I received word that the new regime at Showtime might not want to continue with the fourth. The series was expensive to produce, since we always did our utmost to do justice to the architecture, design and costume of the period, however free we allowed ourselves to be with the actual events. The ratings were steady, if not spectacular, but there was a large network of avid fans, who followed the machinations of the family, their loves, the losses, their tragedies with absolute devotion. As a compromise I proposed a two-hour film, which would bring the story of the family to a satisfactory and apocalyptic conclusion. For a variety of reasons, mainly cost, Showtime decided not to proceed with the two-hour film.

I am presenting this screenplay as an ebook to show those fans how the story they love so much would have concluded. Screenplays are not novels, not really even plays, they are like architectural sketches for an unconstructed city. But they do tell a story, through dialogue, and one of the great pleasures of writing *The Borgias* was the realisation that cable viewers and fans actually care about dialogue in a way that a cinema audience no longer does. This was a totally unexpected blessing to me as a writer since I could return to the basic pleasure of words, and let the characters be defined, and refined through the words they spoke.

So here we have the words. We don't have the pictures, the costumes, the actors, but the fans at least can read how I would have concluded the story. And since the most avid fan of the series was myself, I should state that I am available to direct this, should Showtime ever change their minds.

- Neil Jordan

INT. ALPHONSO'S PALACE. DAWN.

A pair of white-slipped feet walk up the magnificent staircase.

A servant girl comes down, with a pile of bloodied blankets in her hands.

She steps back and bows, in confusion.

SERVANT GIRL

Holiness...

It is the Pope of Rome.

INT. LUCREZIA'S BEDROOM. DAWN.

The dead and bloodied body of Alphonso on the bed. The Pope enters, in the deep background.

He looks at the scene, shocked. He takes Alphonso's dead wrist in his hand.

Then he falls to his knees, begins the prayer of Last Rites.

ALEXANDER

Requiscat in pacem...

And we hear a voice, O.S.

CESARE (O.S.)

Back the cart into the stable gates. We can't leave a trace of-

And as he enters, with Rufio, the Pope raises his head.

ALEXANDER

What is this?

He gestures to the bed.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

This outrage? This crime? This unholy mess?

CESARE

I can explain, Father –

Alexander looks down at the body. The blood everywhere. The wound.

ALEXANDER

No. No-one can explain this.

Cesare turns to Rufio.

CESARE

Leave us –

Alexander stands.

ALEXANDER

Are you to become your brother? Who in the end could not be trusted with a public whipping?

CESARE

Father, he assaulted me –

And Alexander hits him, open palmed, across the face.

ALEXANDER

And you, what? Did him to death? Our son in law? Under our protection? In the palace we provided for his safety?

CESARE

I will clean up this mess, father –

ALEXANDER

Oh yes, you will. Another body will be fished from the Tiber. Another drunkard arraigned for some night-time brawl. You will wash this palace clean of blood. And you will recall your manservant...

CESARE

Micheletto?

ALEXANDER

Who alone could be trusted with such matters.

CESARE

He doesn't speak to me. Of late.

ALEXANDER

Well then. Get him to speak to me...

INT. THE BORGIA VILLA. DAWN.

Lucrezia, in a bath. She is being bathed by her mother, Vanozza.

LUCREZIA

Take me out of here, mother.

VANOZZA

You would leave me here alone?

LUCREZIA

I am afraid of him now. The one I love most in the world.

VANOZZA

He would never harm a hair on your head.

LUCREZIA

No. But he would harm others. Anyone I come close to is doomed.

She begins to cry.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

Have we become the family from hell, mother?

VANOZZA

Perhaps. Since we were given the keys of Heaven.

LUCREZIA

I need to hide. Until I gather my thoughts again. My spirits. You must know a nunnery. That can hide a troubled soul.

VANOZZA

There are many. And there is only one way to get you safely there.

INT. SHABBY ROOM. PAPAL BARRACKS. DAY.

The body of Alphonso, laid out on a wooden trestle. Rufio is there, with two rough henchmen.

Cesare enters.

CESARE

He was a drunkard, you understand?

RUFIO

We do my Lord.

Cesare pulls a knife.

CESARE

And an incompetent brawler.

He stabs the body of the dead Alphonso.

CESARE (CONT'D)

In a fight over a tavern whore –

He stabs the body many times.

CESARE (CONT'D)

They stabbed him like a wine bag-

He stabs it one last time.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Till he could bleed no more.

He turns.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Now dump him in the Tiber –

EXT. TIBER. NIGHT.

Rufio slips in the body of Alphonso.

INT. BORGIA VILLA GARDENS. NIGHT.

Lucrezia there, dressed in a nun's costume.

Vanozza enters through the back door, and a familiar figure comes behind her.

Micheletto.

MICHELETTO

I would not have taken this summons from anyone but you.

LUCREZIA

And this is true, mother.

VANOZZA

On your child's life, it is...

The boy now is led into the gardens.

MICHELETTO

May I?

When Lucrezia nods he takes him in his arms.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

And you will tell me where we are headed?

VANOZZA

A nunnery, south of here.

Micheletto tweaks the child's cheek.

MICHELETTO

This boy? Among nuns?

VANOZZA

No. Giovanni will stay with me.

EXT. NUNNERY. DAY.

A convent, situated amongst rolling hills.

Micheletto leads Lucrezia towards it.

LUCREZIA

You will stay with us?

MICHELETTO

It is a nunnery, my lady. I cannot.

LUCREZIA

But I will be safe here?

MICHELETTO

No word of where you are shall pass my lips.

LUCREZIA

Even if my brother demands it?

MICHELETTO

I have not seen your brother. For months now.

LUCREZIA

But my father has summoned you, no? And when the Pope summons, even you must attend?

INT. CONFESSIONAL. NIGHT.

The Pope, sitting alone in his confessional. A figure slips in on the other side of the booth.

Micheletto.

MICHELETTO

I cannot beg for forgiveness, Holiness –

ALEXANDER

Why not?

MICHELETTO

Because my sins are numberless. And you are asking me to resume this life of... crime...

ALEXANDER

I am asking you to serve as manservant to the Gonfaliere of the Pope of Rome...

MICHELETTO

I killed one dear to me in your son's service. It left me with a wound that is hard to heal.

ALEXANDER

Pray to God then to salve that wound. And put yourself in His service once more...

MICHELETTO

God does not speak to me of late. If He has ever...

ALEXANDER

He hears the pleas of all, Micheletto. Even one who must serve Him in the shadows, like you.

MICHELETTO

Ah. So the knife and the garotte are part of God's plan?

ALEXANDER

We rule God's kingdom for Him, Micheletto. His enemies wield those weapons. And sometimes s
must we.

MICHELETTO

I will not be serving God, Holiness. I will be serving your son, Cesare Borgia.

ALEXANDER

And he needs you. He misses you.

On Micheletto's face. He misses Cesare as well.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

He is weaker, in your absence.

INT. VATICAN PALACE. DAY.

The French ambassador, before the Pope, in full ceremonial mode. Cesare stands behind the Pope, a kind of consigliere.

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

King Louis of France is already on his way, Your Holiness.

ALEXANDER

More French armies? This is all that Rome needs.

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

He comes in peace, as your Holiness well knows. He would swear eternal loyalty to Rome, to God and his Pope. And he would discuss with you the troubled issue of Naples.

ALEXANDER

Are the French slow learners? Did the last invasion of Naples teach them nothing?

CESARE

Father –

ALEXANDER

Oh of course. We have a grander design here. We restructure Italy between us. Is that the game?

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

I am not party to the king's deeper intent –

ALEXANDER

A pity. We enjoy such games. And have proven rather adept at them, in the past –

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

In fact, Your Holiness, I must now say a goodbye of kinds. I must relinquish my post.

ALEXANDER

Your name again?

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

Archbishop D'Ambroise, ambassador to the French King.

ALEXANDER

Of course. You are to join us here. As cardinal. From the frying pan into the fire. And your successor

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

I have not been graced with his name, Your Holiness –

INT. CESARE'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cesare in a bath, being attended by some man or woman servant. His father stands in the background.

ALEXANDER

So. Another Neapolitan invasion. This time with our compliance.

CESARE

We must ride the dragon of events, father.

ALEXANDER

The dragon of events. Does he breathe fire? The Spanish will be breathing fire, when they get wind
it.

A figure appears behind the Pope. Micheletto. Cesare doesn't know he is there.

The Pope holds a hand up, to make sure Micheletto keeps quiet.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Though if we offered to divide the kingdom...

CESARE

Naples? Ruled by Spain and France?

ALEXANDER

Stranger alliances have happened. And it would keep them off our backs. Occupied, so to speak, in the Neapolitan swamp.

The Pope turns, and puts a finger to his lips. He tiptoes out, leaving Micheletto there, looking at Cesare's broad back.

Cesare keeps the conversation going.

CESARE

It would be a sweet revenge, would it not? Their king deposed? Or can we hope for his hanging?

MICHELETTO

We can hope.

Cesare turns.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

You see I know him of old.

Micheletto gives a half smile.

MICHELETTO (CONT'D)

As I know you?

CESARE

You would surprise me, my friend? Naked, like this?

He stands out of the bath.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Then you must embrace me.

Micheletto walks forwards and embraces him.

CESARE (CONT'D)

What brought you back?

MICHELETTO

Your father. The game.

CESARE

You have been away too long...

INT. CHAPEL. NUNNERY. DAY.

Lucrezia and Pia, a young demure nun, are scrubbing the floor in the chapel.

PIA

Take care, between the cracks, sister –

She looks at Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA

I told you. I have not yet taken vows.

PIA

Yet everyone has a name. A name they were born with, one they adopt.

LUCREZIA

I shall become... sister Angela...

PIA

Good. I can call you that.

LUCREZIA

The Reverend Mother examines between the tiles, then?

PIA

Yes. With her fingernail. And any dirt will be punished-

LUCREZIA

With a whipping?

PIA

She does not whip, but her words are worse than any lash.

And Lucrezia scrubs fiercely.

LUCREZIA

My crack then shall be cleaner than yours - ever was –

Pia smiles nervously. And we do not know if she gets the pun.

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

Catherina Sforza, asleep on her plain bed. She looks up in amazement, at something out of shot.

BY THE BARS OF HER PRISON –

A white-gloved hand stretches in, with a ring, inviting a kiss.

CATHERINA

You will have to have my legs broken, Holiness. If you want to see me kneel.

ALEXANDER

A kiss might suffice.

CATHERINA

A kiss?

ALEXANDER

Rather than a genuflection.

We see Alexander now, in the flickering torchlight.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Your legendary beauty is fading in here. It is starved of daylight. It pains us to see such a wonder be reduced.

CATHERINA

Send me home then.

ALEXANDER

Without a formal surrender? Without a pledge of eternal service to the Pope of Rome?

CATHERINA

Without me kneeling...

ALEXANDER

That is impossible, I am afraid.

CATHERINA

Not only must I be defeated, I must be seen to be defeated.

ALEXANDER

And the whole world must see it.

CATHERINA

But the whole world knows, Your Holiness. My lands have been seized, my castle ravished, my body

ALEXANDER

Your body ravished? By whom?

CATHERINA

Well, your son had his way with it some time ago. But then I also took my pleasures on his...

ALEXANDER

So he confessed.

CATHERINA

To you?

She smiles.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

How intimate...

ALEXANDER

We share most things.

And she is beginning to see an opening.

CATHERINA

So I have heard.

She walks closer to the bars.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

Might I suggest, Holiness?

ALEXANDER

Yes?

CATHERINA

You have tried brute force. You have tried chains, prison walls, and none have made me kneel to you.

What you have not yet tried is. . .

She brings her lips close to the bars.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

Kindness.

ALEXANDER

Kindness?

CATHERINA

A soft word. A gentle touch, can often achieve what the whip and the rack cannot.

ALEXANDER

Ah...

He touches her lips with his hand.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

We could unlock that indomitable heart, with just a word or two?

CATHERINA

Perhaps.

ALEXANDER

Well, let us put it to the test. Perhaps you could join us for supper, some days hence.

CATHERINA

Still in chains?

ALEXANDER

And if words can melt you, we will do our best to find them.

EXT. BALCONY. VATICAN. DAY.

A balcony overlooking the gardens. Micheletto and Cesare.

CESARE

So my father's pleas carry more weight than mine?

MICHELETTO

It was time. And he made me realise. I am weaker without you. As are you, without me.

CESARE

Did you explain your absence to him?

MICHELETTO

You had me kill one I loved.

CESARE

I had you kill one that played with you. And me.

MICHELETTO

Still...it scared me...

CESARE

Where?

Micheletto takes Cesare's hand and places it on his heart.

MICHELETTO

Here.

CESARE

So. You have a heart?

MICHELETTO

Not anymore.

CESARE

Ah, so you are fit for service once again?

Micheletto glances down into the gardens, where we can see Rufio, waiting.

MICHELETTO

Is there still room for me?

CESARE

For one I trust such as you? Of course.

MICHELETTO

And you trust him?

Cesare smiles.

CESARE

So far.

MICHELETTO

You shouldn't.

CESARE

Prove it to me then. Why I shouldn't. And we will be as one, once more.

Cesare embraces him.

CESARE (CONT'D)

Come. Meet your... other...

MICHELETTO

Must I?

CESARE

Yes. Things have changed here. Greatly.

INT. CELL IN NUNNERY. NIGHT.

Pia, dressing for bed. As she takes off her bonnet, we see her hair is shorn.

Lucrezia takes off her bonnet, but keeps white wimple on underneath.

PIA

You sleep with your wimple –

LUCREZIA

Yes. As I did last night. And the night before that –

PIA

Does the Reverend Mother know?

LUCREZIA

Not unless you tell her.

PIA

There are rules here, that govern every minute of our day. And we are sworn to keep them –

LUCREZIA

Well can you keep a secret then?

Pia stares at her.

PIA

Yes.

Lucrezia comes close to her. Almost lip to lip.

LUCREZIA

Promise?

PIA

I shouldn't, but I do.

LUCREZIA

I obey no rules.

She takes off her wimple, and her beautiful hair spreads down around her shoulders.

Pia gasps. As if she has never seen such beauty.

PIA

You are not a nun. Not even a novitiate?

Lucrezia smiles.

LUCREZIA

I am serving penance.

PIA

What penance?

LUCREZIA

The penance of Sappho.

PIA

Sappho?

LUCREZIA

Yes. She made the mistake of loving a woman.

PIA

A woman?

LUCREZIA

A long time ago. On the island of Lesbos.

Lucrezia lies down on her hard bed.

LUCREZIA (CONT'D)

But when my penance is done, my father has promised. To take me back. To barter me in marriage like any other child bearing beast of burden.

PIA

I would rather be a nun, sister Angela.

LUCREZIA

And some nights, sister Pia, so would I.

EXT. GARDEN. NIGHT.

Cesare approaches Rufio, with Micheletto.

CESARE

Rufio. Meet my Micheletto.

They look at each other and nod.

CESARE (CONT'D)

You know each other?

RUFIO

I have heard of him.

Cesare looks at Micheletto.

CESARE

And you?

Micheletto slowly shakes his head. Rufio holds out his hand.

RUFIO

You are a legend.

MICHELETTO

Ah. Where?

RUFIO

Throughout the whole of Italy. Wherever men fight.

Micheletto shakes Rufio's hand.

MICHELETTO

You were Catherina Sforza's man...

RUFIO

I was.

MICHELETTO

And you can change allegiance so easily? From Florence to Rome?

RUFIO

She is the past. He is... the future...

Micheletto looks from Cesare to Rufio.

MICHELETTO

And long may he remain so.

INT. CASTEL ST ANGELO. DAY.

Adriana, the servant girl, washes Catherina Sforza's hair.

CATHERINA

My confinement is improving.

ADRIANA

Is it?

CATHERINA

It must be, if they allow you to wash my hair.

She takes a dead louse from the water.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

But it will never end.

ADRIANA

They cannot keep you here forever.

CATHERINA

Oh yes they can. And will. Among rats and lice.

She takes Adriana's hand in hers.

CATHERINA (CONT'D)

The Pope sent you, did he not? As a peace offering, of kinds?

ADRIANA

I was told to do whatever would make you comfortable...

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